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Respect the ride

By Mollie Miller
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Even after 25 years of riding All-Terrain Vehicles, Sgt. 1st Class Jon King says he still has a lot to learn about how to handle a machine that, although fun, can turn into a death trap at any second.

"You're never too old or too experienced to learn something new," the Fort Rucker, Ala., career counselor said recently. "I learn something new about ATVs every single time I ride."

During the past quarter century he has spent in the saddle of an ATV, King said he has learned many things including to never driving too fast in unknown terrain and, following a recent riding incident in Alabama, the importance of good personal protective equipment.

"Earlier this season, I was riding around at low speeds and got bounced off the ATV," King said. "I was lucky not to be injured but was surprised at just how much it hurt. Since then, I have started wearing my body armor in addition to all the standard personal protective equipment."

Not everyone is as lucky as King. Every year, hundreds of people are killed and thousands are injured in ATV-related accidents nationwide. In 2008, 410 people were killed and more than 135,000 were injured in ATV-related accidents according to information released by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.

The Army team is not immune to these statistics. Last year, the U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center logged 14 ATV accidents that resulted in one fatality and several severe injuries. Since the beginning of FY 2010, the USACR/Safety Center has already recorded four accidents, one of which resulted in the death of a Soldier.

Many of the same mistakes were made in each of these 18 accidents, according to Steve Kurtiak, Privately Owned Vehical and Recreational Safety Specialist at the USACR/Safety Center. Most of the noted mistakes, he added, are easily correctable.

"Most of our ATV accidents involve riders who lack experience and training, are operating the ATVs impaired, or are operating the machines too fast for conditions," he said. "Flipping an ATV while climbing a steep hill and crashing into fixed objects is quite common"

King's recent revelation to expand his ATV PPE is also an important piece of the ATV safety equation that many riders ignore, according to Kurtiak.

"Riders must wear the appropriate gear all the time including a full face helmet, goggles, long-sleeved riding shirt, padded gloves, riding pants with shin guards and over the ankle boots," he said. "A smart rider will also wear a chest/back protector to protect from crush injuries if they get trapped under the ATV after it flips."

King said he and his two sons, ages 12 and 10, all wear full PPE including chest protection when they ride to ensure safety and he encourages all riders, regardless of age or experience, to do the same because “you never know what an ATV might do.”

“ATVs are extremely dangerous because they pop wheelies very fast and can flip over on you in a second,” he said. “ATV tires are also designed to be very bouncy so at high speeds, and even at low speeds, a rider can easily be bounced off.”

Both Kurtiak and King emphasize the importance of training, education and preparation to ensure every ATV ride is a safe one.

“Attend a training class, learn about your machine and educate yourself about the area you are riding in,” King said. “Read the accident reports and learn from others mistakes because you certainly can’t make all the mistakes yourself.”

Kurtiak agrees noting that like every other piece of off road equipment, ATVs must be respected for their power and their potential to harm any rider.

“The ATV is not a toy,” he said. “You have to respect it, respect the land you are riding on and do whatever you can to protect yourself while you’re out having fun on your ATV.”

For more information about ATV safety and ride risk management, visit www.atvsafety.gov or <https://safety.army.mil>. An ATV Riding Tips Booklet is also available to download from the ATV Safety Institute at <http://www.atvsafety.org/asi.cfm>

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SIDEBAR

ATV Safety

Like other activities involving high speeds and heavy machinery, riding an ATV can be risky. To help stay safe, follow common sense safety tips.

- Get trained
- Wear a helmet and other protect gear
- No children on adult ATVs
- Don’t ride tandem
- Don’t ride on pavement
- Don’t ride under the influence of drugs or alcohol

Source: U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission



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